

2021

2023 Publication

Youth Sexual Violence Social Norms Survey



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Acknowledgements

This publication was supported by Cooperative Agreement NUF2CE002482, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

The survey was developed, distributed, and analyzed by Jamie Erdheim, Kayla Shannon, Stephanie Fluegeman, and Taryn Gal. This synthesized report was compiled and formatted by Carly Petrusky under the supervision of Patty Durell.

Thank you to our survey team who supported in creating and disseminating this survey to youth across the state:

- Michigan Public Health Institute Center for Healthy Communities
- Safe Haven Ministries & Young Leaders Against Violence
- Kent County Health Department
- MOASH Michigan Youth Girls and Non-Binary Advisory Board
- YWCA West Central Michigan
- Dr. Megan Maas
- D.A. Blodgett - St. John's

We are forever grateful to Stephanie Fleugman, Dr. Sara McGirr, and Dr. Dori Pynnenon Hopkins for their endless support and guidance.

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Abstract

The Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH) identified a gap in available research on sexual violence norms specific to youth in Michigan. In response, the team adapted the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI)'s 2019 Michigan Sexual Violence Prevention Survey into a youth-facing survey using RedCap. The Youth Sexual Violence Social Norms Survey was divided into two main sections: 1) a series of demographic questions and 2) a questionnaire divided into 9 topics that asked respondents to use a Likert scale to agree or disagree with statements about sexual violence. The survey was shared online by MOASH and its network in January and May 2021. It captured data from 493 youth throughout Michigan between the ages of 13-19. The survey found that 70% of youth knew someone who was sexually assaulted and 70% knew someone who experienced abuse. Gender and sexual identity significantly contributed to how youth understood sexual violence, especially with practicing consent digitally. Given these findings, MOASH's team asserts that continued prevention education efforts in grades K-12 needed to create norms that keep young people safe in Michigan.

About the Survey

The Story

The Michigan Organization on Adolescent Sexual Health (MOASH) is a 501c3 non-partisan organization that was founded in 2008 by statewide leaders and advocates of adolescent sexual health. Today, MOASH mobilizes youth voices, engages community partners, and informs decision-makers to advance sexual health, identities, and rights in the state. MOASH is committed to centering youth voices, and all projects are youth-informed from start to finish.

The survey was inspired by the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) 2019 Michigan Sexual Violence Prevention Survey. The data collected is meant to be used to prevent sexual assault, abuse, and harassment in Michigan. It can also be used to improve resources for community based prevention programs. However, this data was only collected from adults. The Sexual Violence Prevention Team, coordinated by MOASH as part of the MDHHS and CDC funded program, needed data on sexual violence norms specific to youth in Michigan. It felt crucial for their work, and the work of their partners, to collect it. In 2020, the team adapted the MPHI survey into a version that could be applicable to youth.

This survey was shared online with youth between the ages 13-19 in January and May 2021 via social media and the team's networks. Special attention was paid to the differences between youth who identify as cisgender boys and youth who are not cisgender boys, queer youth and non-queer youth, and white youth and youth of color. It was developed over a series of meetings and created using RedCap. SPSS was used for data analysis.

MY GAB, Michigan Youth Girls and Non-Binary Advisory Board, worked closely with MOASH's Sexual Violence Prevention Team on this project. MY GAB is a youth advisory council that focuses on empowering girls and nonbinary youth, and changing the culture of consent in Michigan schools. This group is composed of youth across the state and were key players in sharing the survey widely.

Prioritizing youth voices is not only the mission of MOASH; it is necessary for understanding how to best support and protect young people. MPHI's data confirmed that "...communities that are closely connected are more likely to hold people who sexually assault, abuse, or harass others accountable".¹ Participants of this survey found a lack of connectedness and community in Michigan with just less than 50% of respondents stating that their neighborhood is 'close knit'. This is further evidence for the need to build community with young people and provide built-in community support across violence prevention measures.

MOASH is committed to giving youth access to the tools and information needed to recognize their own agency and make choices best for them with respect to their sexual health, relationships, and personal development. We hope that this survey can be one of those tools.

The Survey Topics

To understand norms among youth in Michigan, we asked about:



School Connectedness

How youth feel about being part of their school community



Family Connectedness

How youth feel about people they consider their family



Neighborhood Connectedness

How youth feel about their neighborhood



Hostile Sexism

How youth understand sexist behaviors and opinions



Consent Norms

How youth understand and practice consent



Rape Myth Acceptance

How youth understand and are impacted by rape culture



Support for Survivors

How youth believe those around them would react to sexual assault



Bystander Behavior

How youth believe they would react to abuse and assault

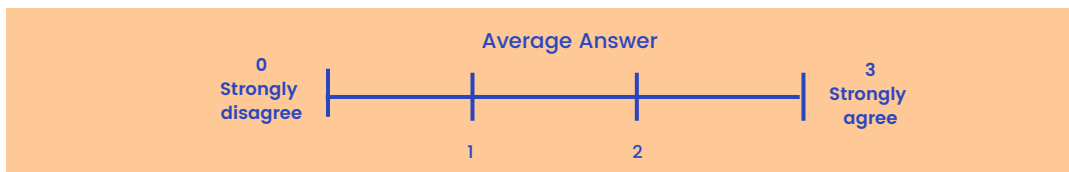


Digital Consent

How youth understand and practice consent in digital spaces

The Scale

Surveyed youth responded to each statement using a Likert scale.



The Likert scale is used to measure the level of agreement with a given statement.² It is commonly used in survey research to understand the survey takers' thoughts and beliefs. In our project, each point on the Likert scale had a corresponding score:

- 0 - strongly disagree
- 1 - disagree
- 2 - agree
- 3 - strongly agree

An average answer was calculated for each question, as well as an overall score for the survey topic.

With consent in mind, surveyed youth were also given the option "prefer not to answer." This was not included in the averaged scores.

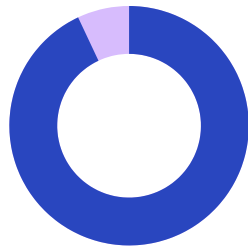
Survey Demographics

493 Total Participants

Gender Identity

93% of survey participants identified as cisgender

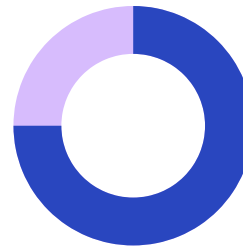
Cisgender = 459
Transgender+ = 34



Racial Identity

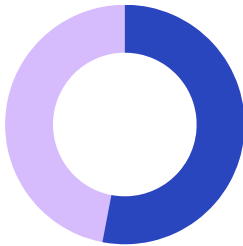
77% of survey participants identified as white

White = 380
People of Color = 113



53% of survey participants identified as boys

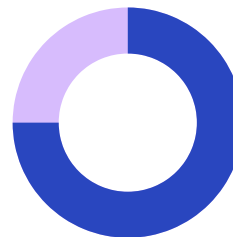
Boys = 266
Not Boys = 227



Sexual Orientation

75% of survey participants identified as straight

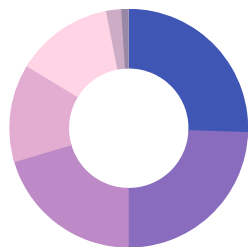
Straight = 372
LGBQ+ = 121



Age

25% of survey participants were 15 years old

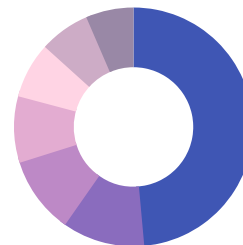
Age 13 = 12 participants
Age 14 = 65 participants
Age 15 = 123 participants
Age 16 = 119 participants
Age 17 = 102 participants
Age 18 = 64 participants
Age 19 = 8 participants



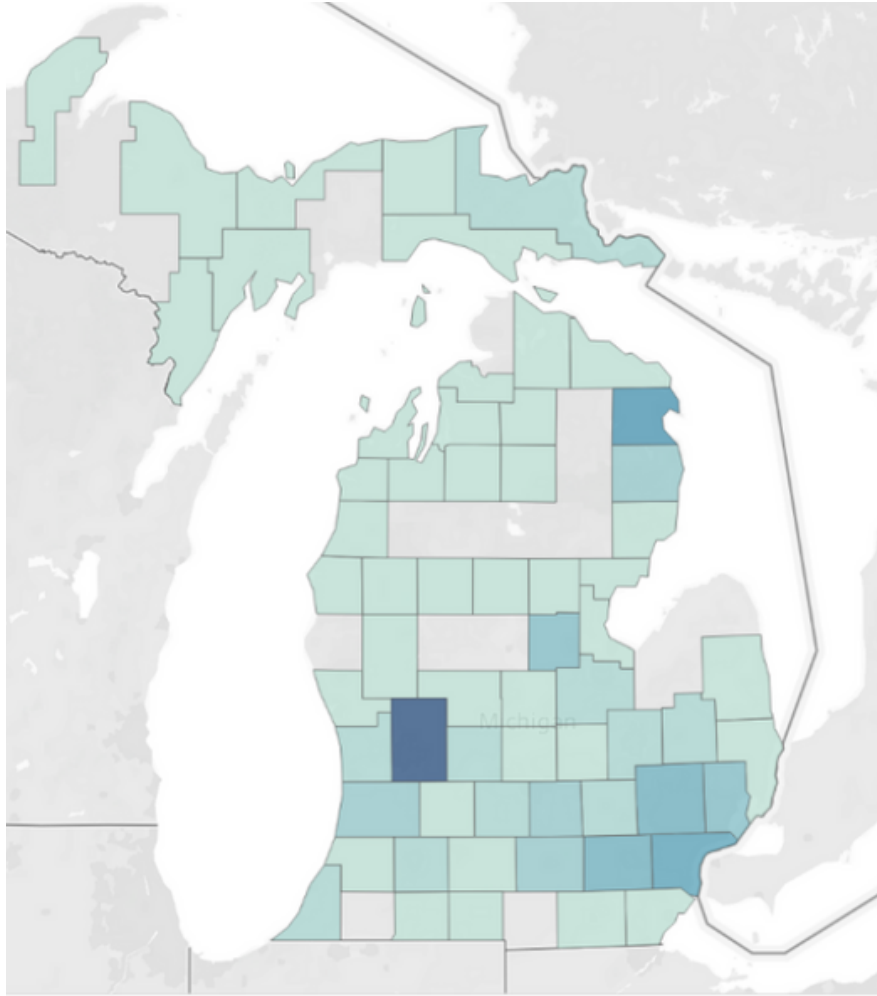
Residence

27% of survey participants lived in Kent county

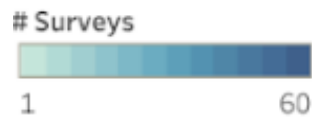
See page 6



Residence (continued)



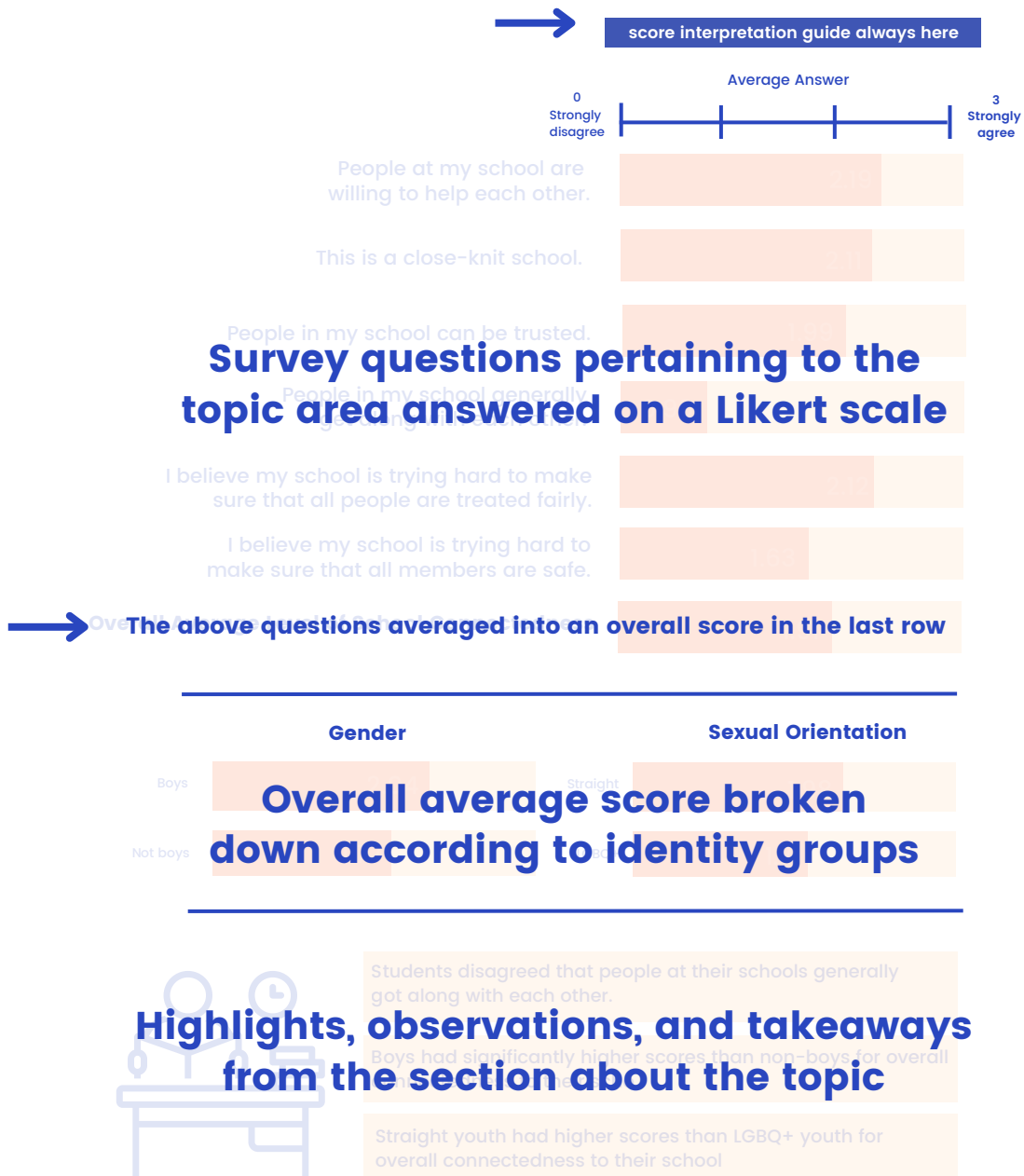
Alpena = 31
Kent = 135
Macomb = 19
Midland = 18
Oakland = 21
Washtenaw = 25
Wayne = 29



How to Read the Data

The Format

The diagram below maps key information about the topic on each data page.



The Statistical Significance

The data collected with this survey was analyzed using statistical testing. Statistical testing is used to find out if the differences in the data are due to something other than chance or coincidence. If a relationship is found after running a series of calculations, this means there is statistical significance.

If something is statistically significant, the differences in the data can likely be connected and used to make meaningful observations about what is being researched. Finding statistical significance is especially helpful when comparing experiences of people who have different identities. Statistically significant findings are noted in the highlights portion of each data page.

At MOASH we are committed to grounding our work in equity, inclusion, diversity, and justice within all aspects of our organization and within the field of adolescent sexual health. Our team prioritized collecting data to understand the difference in beliefs and experiences between white youth and youth of color. Much to our surprise, there was no statistical significance found in comparing answers according to racial identity amongst surveyed youth. Because of this, we focused primarily on reporting statistically significant findings related to gender and sexuality. We would like to remind readers of this report that racial identity significantly shapes experiences and belief systems, and is an important consideration in research of any kind.



Survey Results



Prevalence Rates

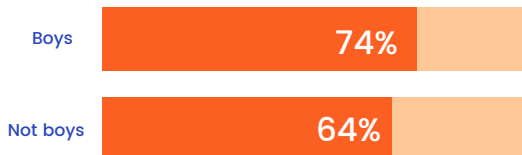
Prevalence is how common an experience is.

Sexual assault is any sexual contact without consent.

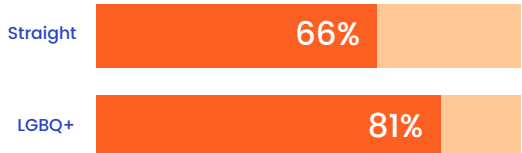
70%

of surveyed students know someone who has experienced sexual assault.

Gender



Sexual Orientation

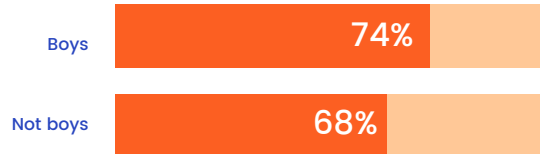


Abuse is when someone causes repeated harm.

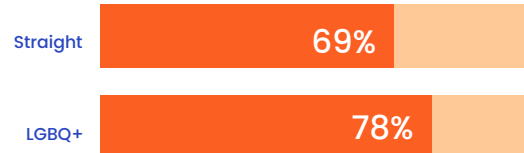
71%

of surveyed students know someone who has experienced abuse.

Gender



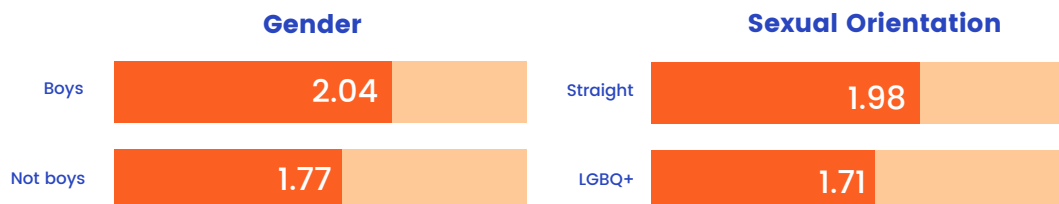
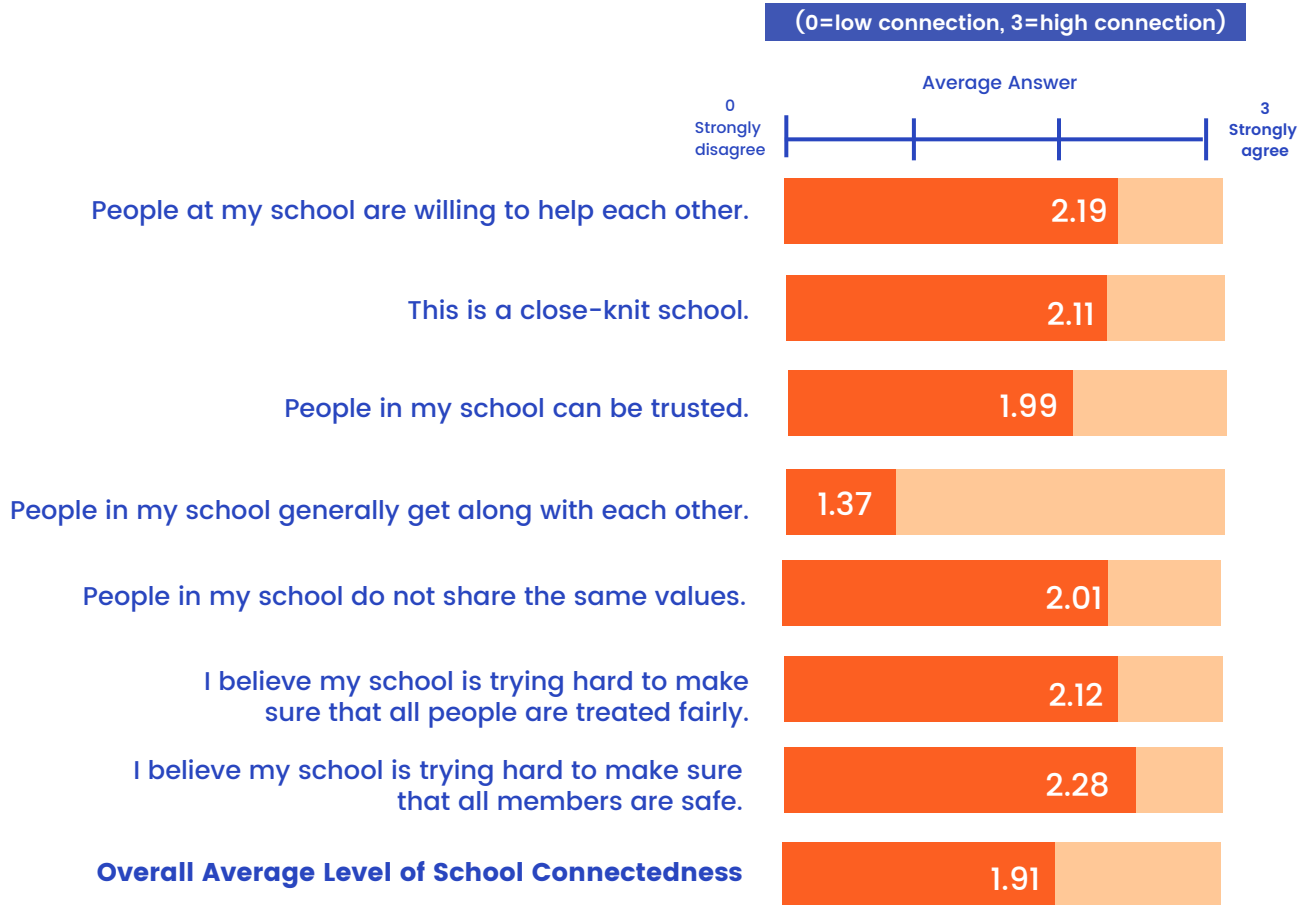
Sexual Orientation



NOTE: This is the only data page that uses percentages to express the survey results.

School Connectedness

Survey respondents who were enrolled at the time of the survey were asked how connected they feel to their school.



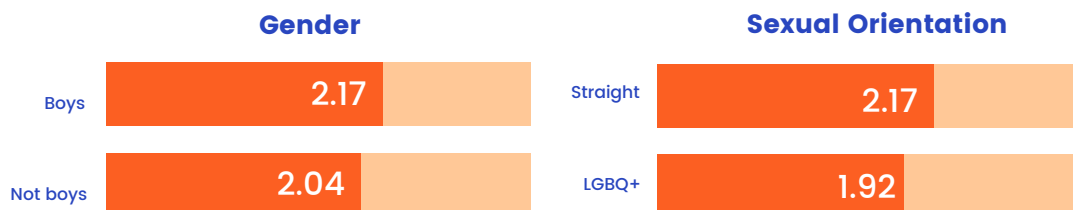
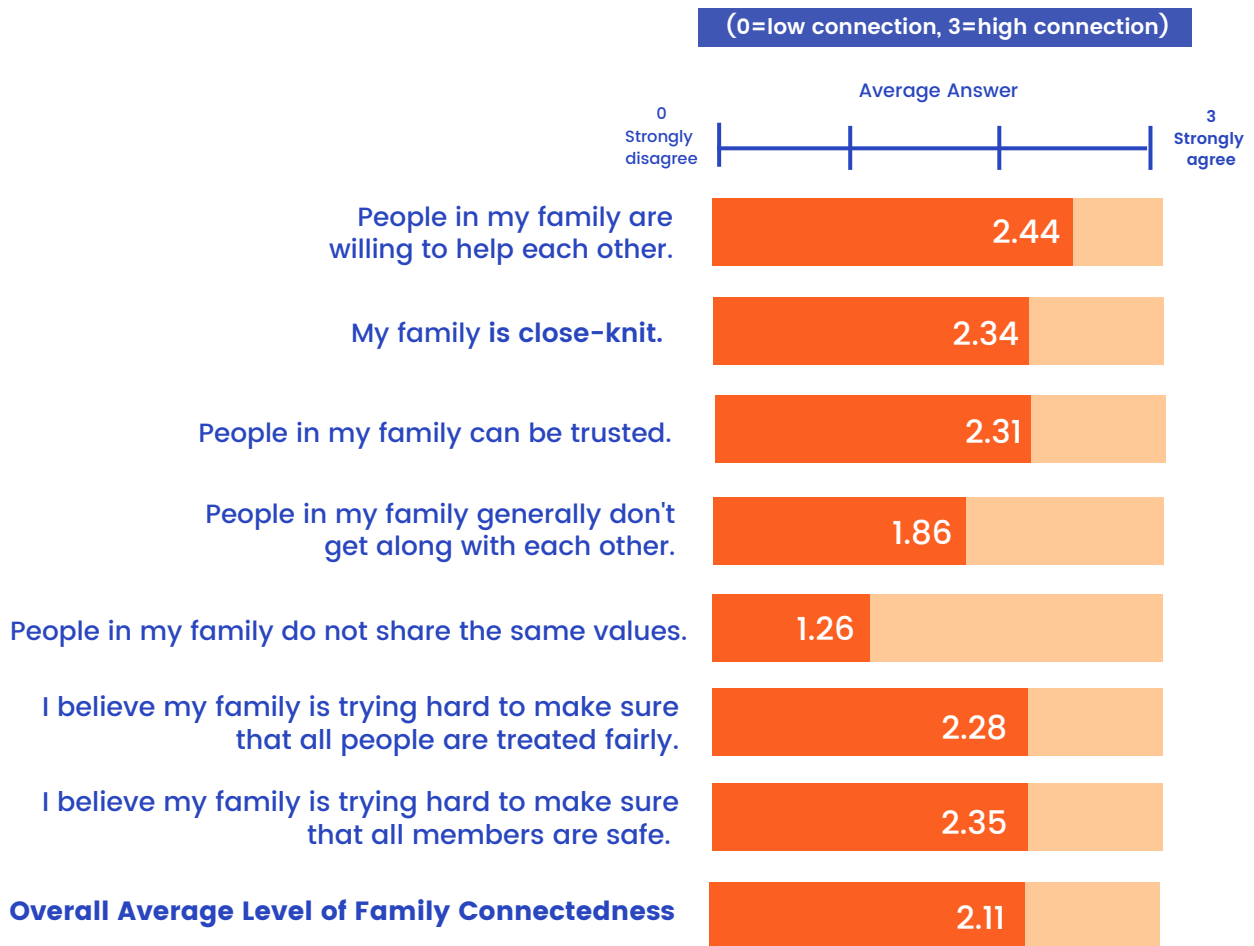
Students disagreed that people at their schools generally got along with each other.

Boys had significantly higher scores than non-boys for overall connectedness to their school.

Straight youth had higher scores than LGBQ+ youth for overall connectedness to their school.

Family Connectedness

Survey respondents were asked how connected they feel to their families. We did not define "family" in the survey.



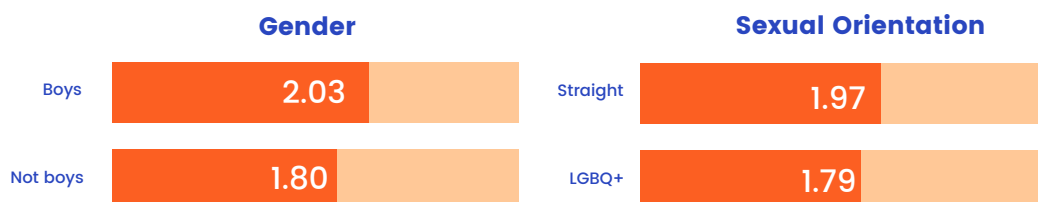
Students surveyed generally agreed that they feel they are connected to their families.

Boys had higher scores than non-boys for overall connectedness to their families.

Straight youth had significantly higher scores than LGBQ+ youth for overall connectedness to their families.

Neighborhood Connectedness

Survey respondents were asked how connected they feel to their neighborhoods. We defined neighborhood as the people and area around where you primarily live.



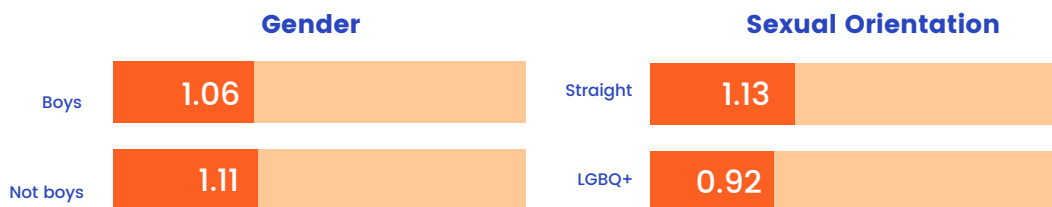
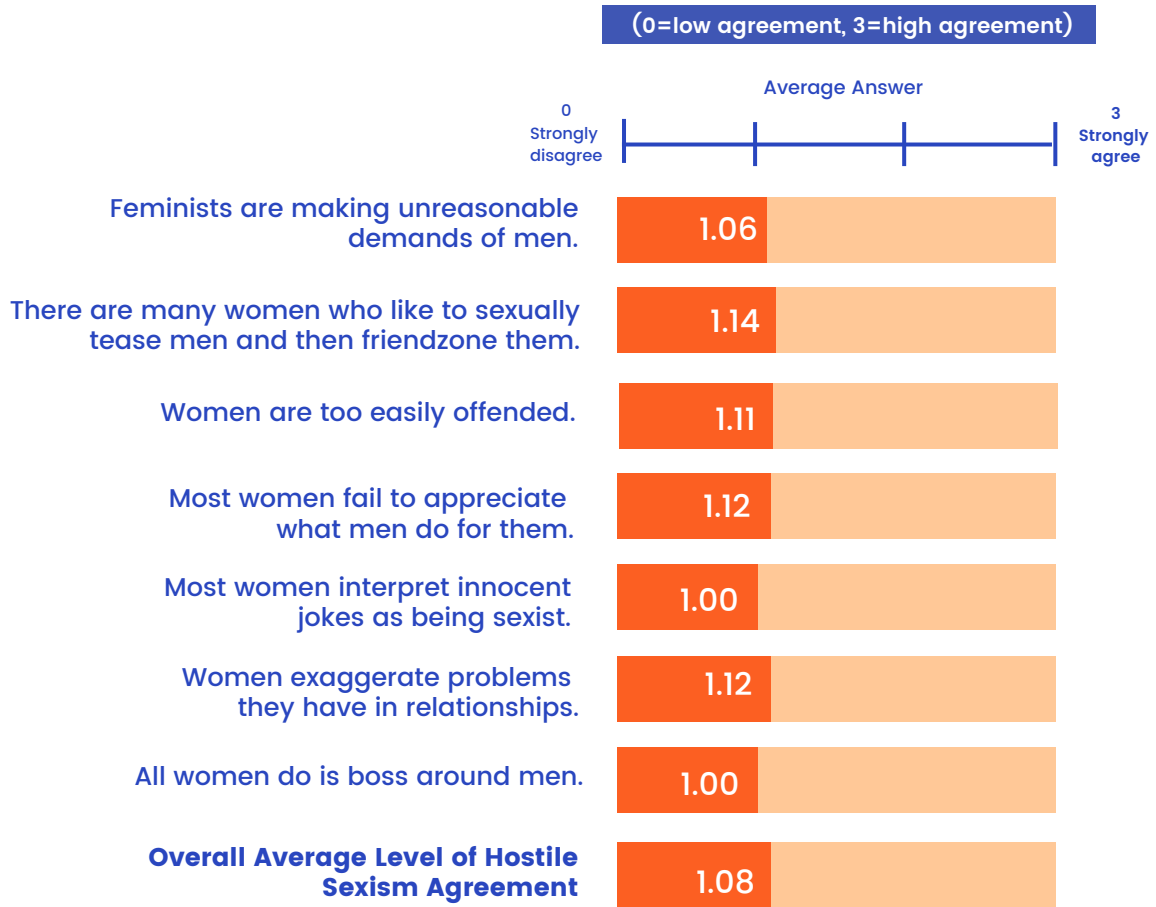
Students surveyed believed that their neighborhood treated all people fairly and kept safe.

Boys had significantly higher scores than non-boys for overall connectedness to their neighborhood.

Straight youth had significantly higher scores than LGBQ+ youth for overall connectedness to their neighborhood.

Hostile Sexism

Survey respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how women/girls and men/boys act and how they interact with each other.

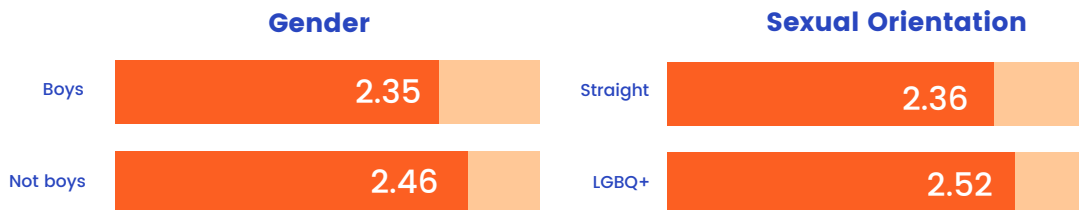
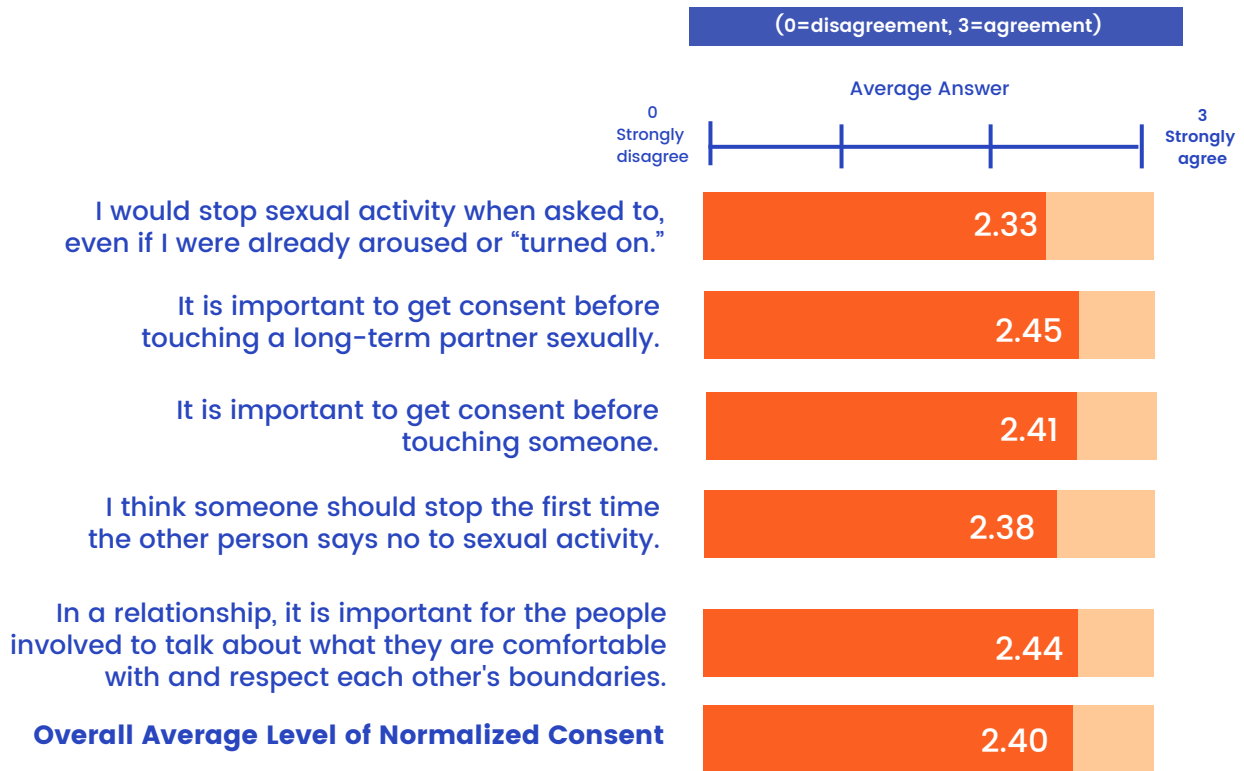


Students generally did not agree with statements containing hostile sexism.

Straight youth had significantly higher scores than LGBQ+ youth for agreement with statements containing hostile sexism.

Consent Norms

Survey respondents were asked how they feel about sexual encounters and sexual consent between two individuals. We defined “consent” as the clear, freely-given agreement to engage in a specific sexual activity.



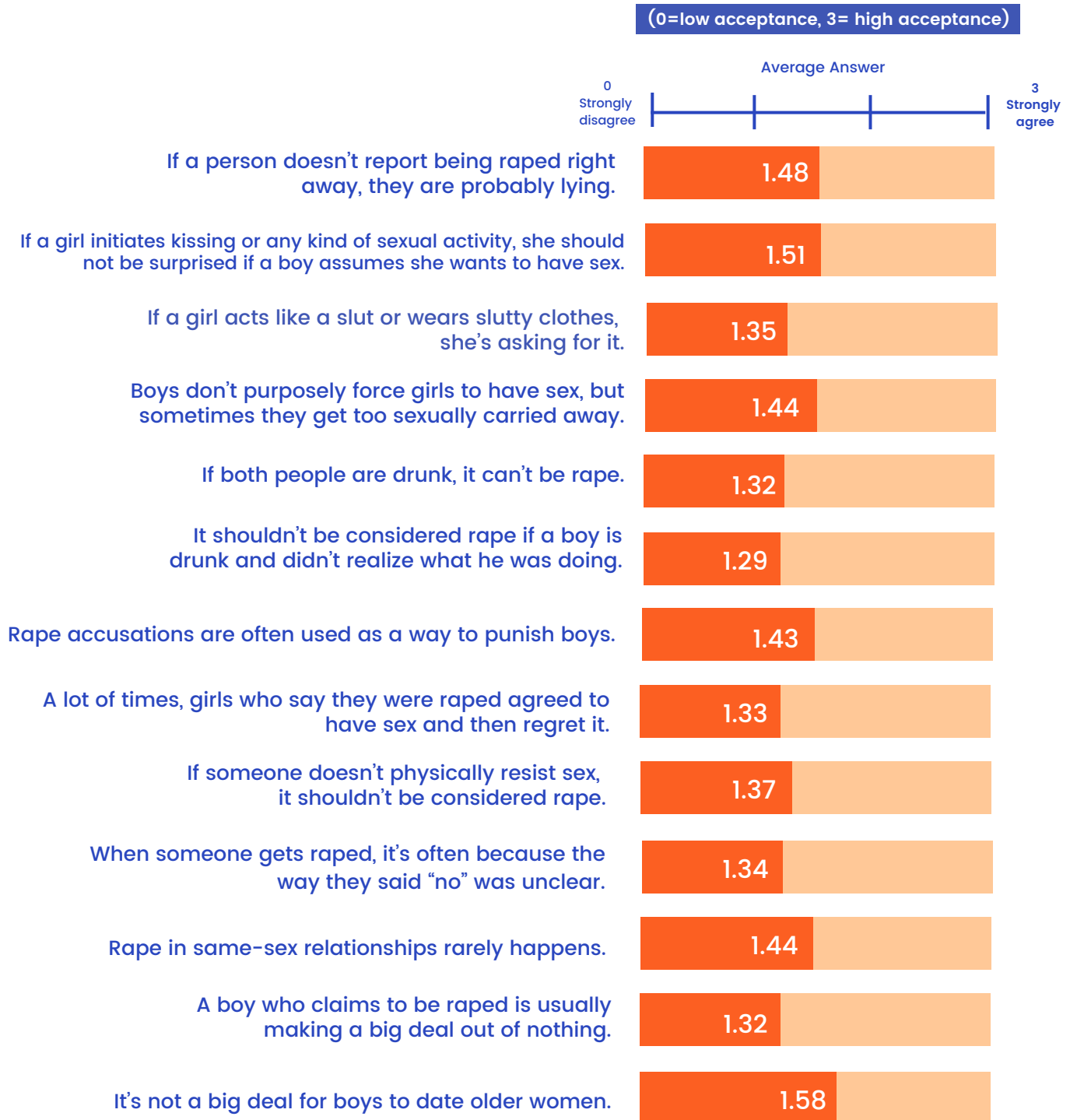
Students surveyed generally agreed with statements about practicing consent during a sexual encounter.

Boys had lower scores than non-boys for overall level of normalized consent.

Straight youth had significantly lower scores than LGBQ+ youth for overall level of normalized consent.

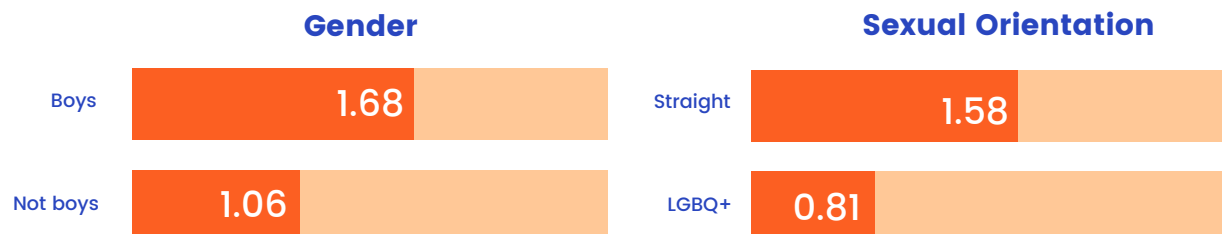
Rape Myth Acceptance

The term “rape” refers to a specific kind of sexual assault, and is defined as sexual penetration of another person’s body without that person’s consent. “Rape myths” are cultural beliefs about rape that sustain and allow sexual violence.³ Survey respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with each of the following statements containing or describing rape myths.



Rape Myth Acceptance

Overall Average Level of Acceptance of Rape Myths



Students surveyed generally disagreed with statements that contained common myths about experiencing rape.

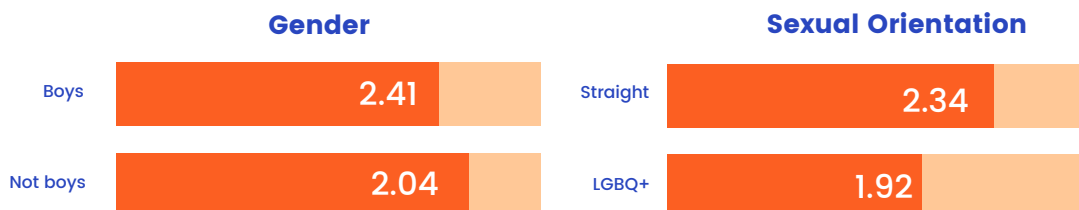
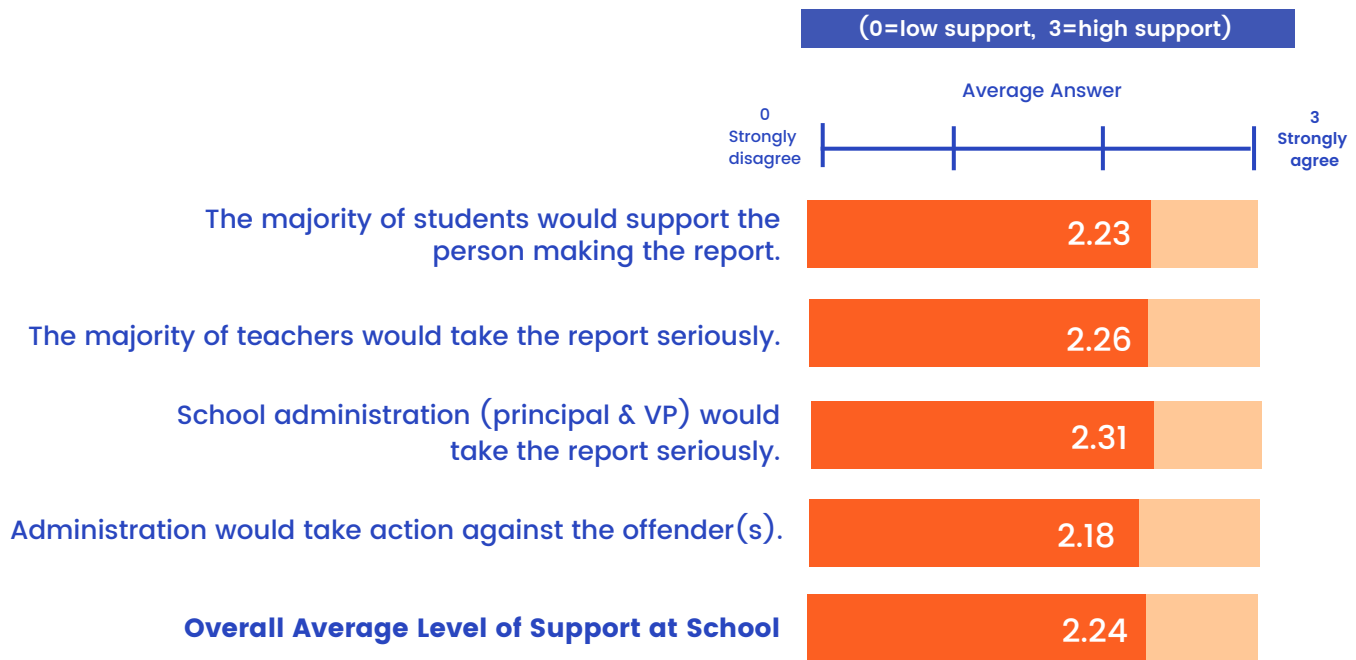
Boys surveyed accepted rape myths significantly more than non-boys.

Straight youth surveyed accepted rape myths significantly more than LGBQ+ youth.

Support for Survivors

At School

Survey respondents were asked, if someone were to report a sexual assault at their school, whether or not they think the following statements would occur. The more likely the event, the higher the perceived level of support for survivors at school.



Students generally assumed that a survivor reporting an assault at school would be supported.

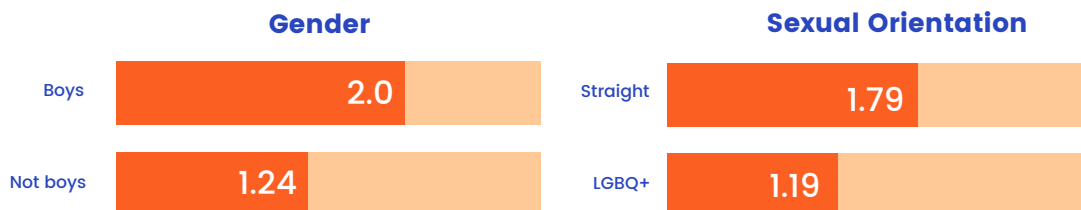
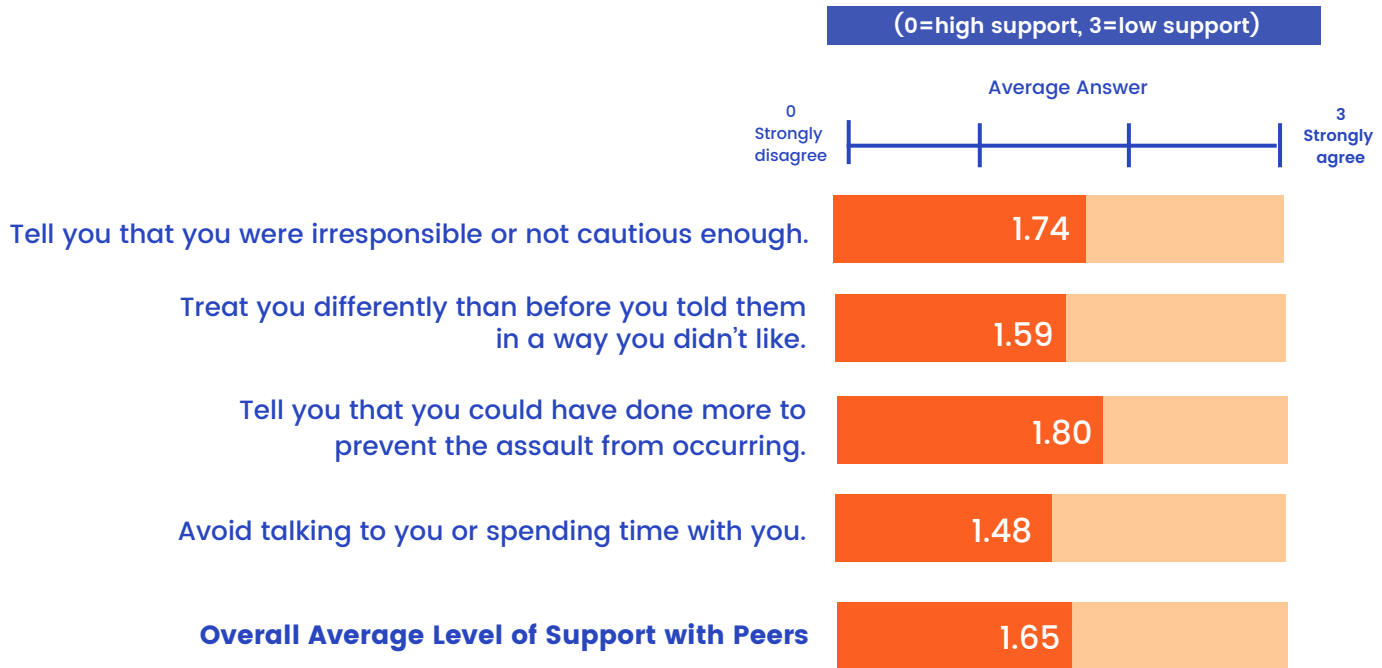
Boys assumed a significantly higher level of support for survivors at school than non-boys.

Straight youth assumed a significantly higher level of support for survivors at school than LGBQ+ youth.

Support for Survivors

With Peers

Survey respondents were asked, if they were sexual assaulted and told their friends, whether or not they think the following statements would occur. The more likely the event, the lower the perceived level of support for survivors amongst their peers.



Students surveyed generally assumed that they would not receive support from their peers.

Boys assumed a significantly lower level of support amongst their peers if they were assaulted than non-boys.

Straight youth assumed a significantly lower level of support amongst their peers than LGBQ+ youth.

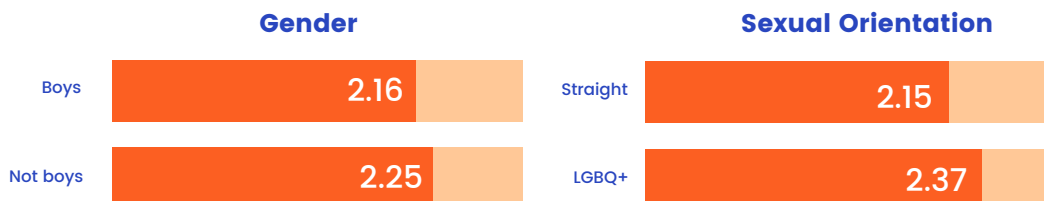


Bystander Behavior

Intervention

Surveyed youth were asked if they agreed with the following statements suggesting how they might act if they saw or suspected sexual assault or abuse.

(0=low likelihood, 3=high likelihood)



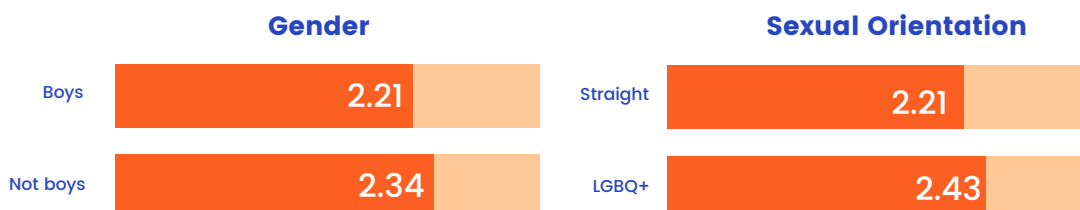
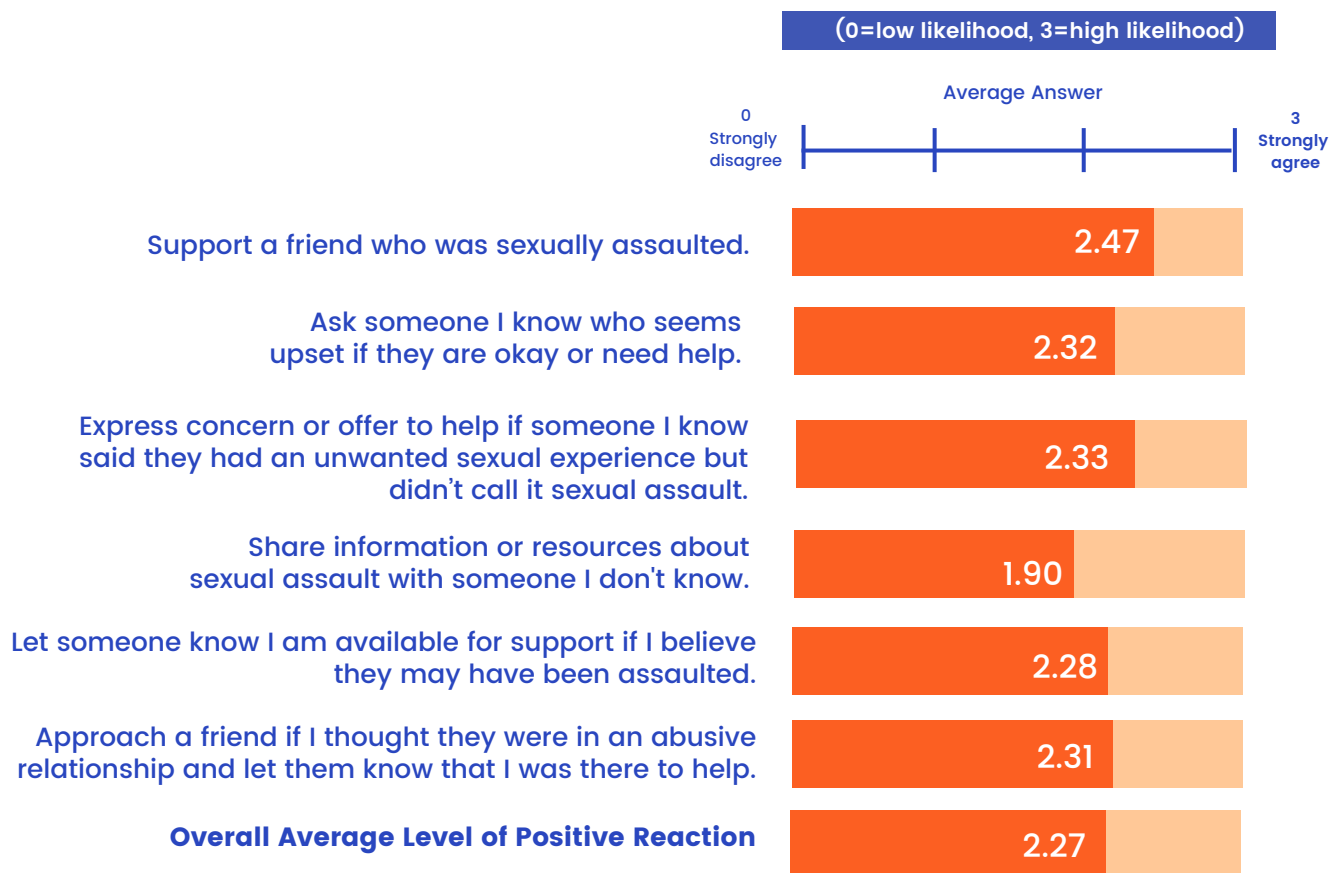
Students surveyed generally indicated that they would intervene if they witnessed a potential assault situation.

Non-Boys indicated they would be more likely to intervene if they witnessed a potential assault situation.

Straight youth were significantly less likely to intervene if they witnessed a potential assault situation.

Reaction

Surveyed youth were asked how likely they are to engage in these behaviors.



Students surveyed generally indicated that they would react in a positive way towards someone who is being abused.

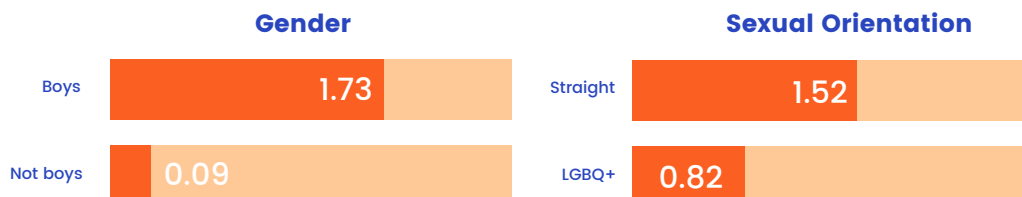
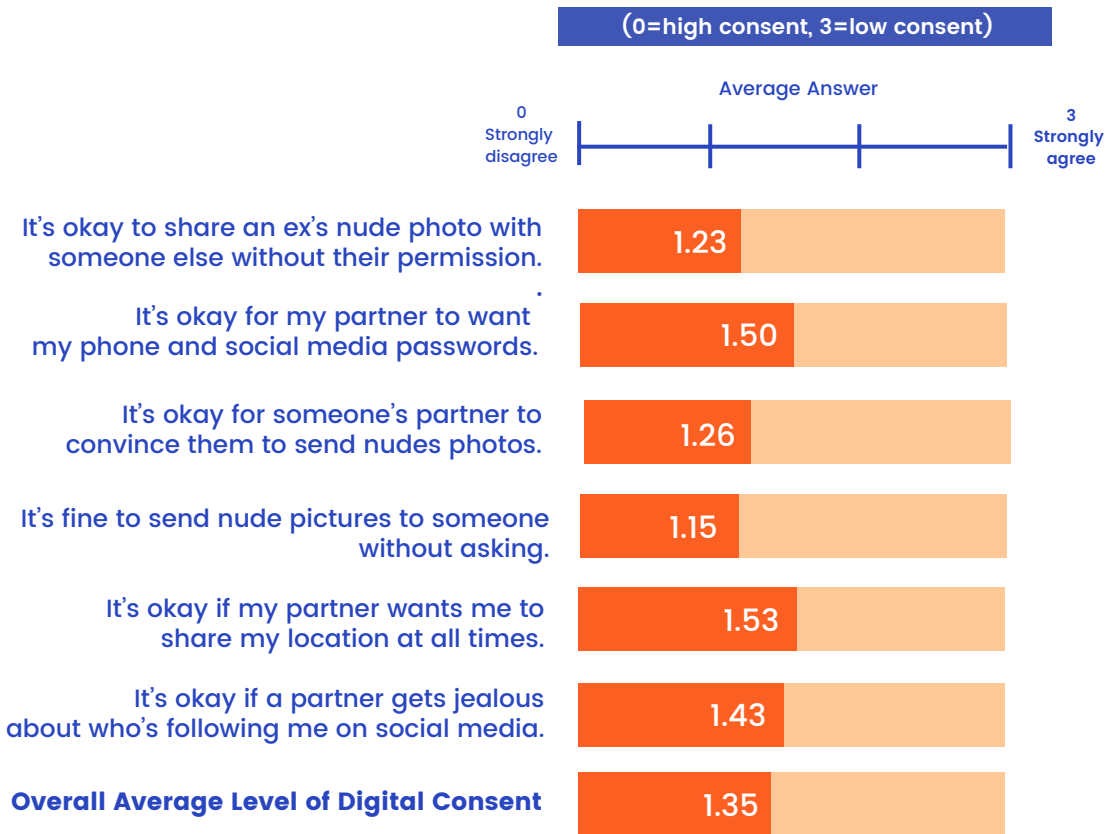
Boys had lower scores than non-boys for overall level of likelihood of reacting to sexual assault.

LGBQ+ youth had significantly higher likelihood of reacting to sexual assault and other abusive behavior.



Digital Consent

Digital abuse is the use of technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. To avoid this, digital consent is crucial. Surveyed youth were asked if they agreed with the following statements about digital consent.



Students surveyed generally agreed with statements about practicing digital consent.

Boys had a significantly lower understanding of digital consent than non-boys.

LGBQ+ youth had a significantly higher understanding of digital consent than straight youth.

Survey Limitations

Limitations are elements of the project design or circumstances that could have impacted the findings. Identifying limitations gives context to research, acknowledges problems, and shows where more work is needed.



Geographic Location

MOASH successfully reached many counties in Michigan, but not all. Additionally, some counties were over-represented in the sample, such as southwestern Kent County.



Transgender+ Representation

MOASH was able to reach a significantly more cisgender youth compared to transgender+ youth.



Language Accessibility

MOASH developed the survey in English and did not translate it into other languages for dissemination. This limited the collection of data to youth who could read this language.



Ability

MOASH did not ask about the ability of surveyed youth. Though some of the youth likely identify as disabled, we did not collect that information specifically and are unable to compare the norms of those with and without this identity.

Conclusions

The purpose of this survey was to understand how youth in Michigan create, understand, and accept sexual violence norms. Each data page highlights key observations made according to a specific component of these belief systems. Considering that information, our team has made the following conclusions:

Gender identity contributed to how youth understood consent, their connections to people around them, and support available to them. For example: Youth who identified as boys had a less advanced understanding of consent, often having beliefs that perpetuated harm and cultural myths about sexual violence. Boys also did not believe that they would be supported by their peers if they disclosed that they were assaulted.

Sexual identity contributed to how youth understood consent, their connections to people around them, and support available to them. This was especially true for youth who identified as LGBTQ+. These students did not feel as connected to or supported by their schools, families, and neighborhoods as straight youth, but LGBTQ+ youth had advanced knowledge of practicing consent. They were able to differentiate examples of healthy and unhealthy consent more frequently.

The topic with the most significant differences between boys and non boys as well as straight and LGBTQ+ youth was digital consent. Students who identified as boys and/or as straight were in more agreement with statements that were not examples of healthy digital consent. This highlights a greater need for relevant, updated information about consent that is applicable to the interactions student have digitally via mobile apps, websites, or texting.

This survey found that a majority of surveyed youth had an awareness of sexual violence in their community, whether it be something they experienced or only heard about. This high prevalence of abuse and sexual assault highlights the need for sexual violence prevention education in grades K-12, specifically around consent. The school environment is an ideal space for youth to learn about consent and create norms that keep young people safe.

References

1. McGirr, S., Pynnonen Hopkins, D., Fluegeman, S., & Stechschulte, A. (2019). Michigan Sexual Violence Prevention Survey Report. Okemos, MI: Center for Healthy Communities, MPH. Retrieved from https://www.mphi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Michigan-Sexual-Violence-Prevention-Survey-Report_Accessible_FINAL.pdf
2. Mcleod, S. (2019). Likert Scale Definition, examples and analysis. Simply Psychology. Retrieved from <https://www.simplypsychology.org/likert-scale.html>
3. Payne, D. L., Lonsway, K. A., & Fitzgerald, L. F. (1999). Rape myth acceptance: Exploration of its structure and its measurement using The Illinois rape myth acceptance scale. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 33(1), 27–68. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1998.2238>

Resources

Teaching Consent

MOASH Consent Toolkit

https://www.moash.org/_files/ugd/0a340a_b3eac850fa2f41edb49844ef400e57fe.pdf

Support for Survivors

Michigan SA/DV Provider Directory

<https://mcedsv.org/provider-directory/>

Michigan's Sexual Assault Hotline

<https://www.michigan.gov/voices4>

Confidential sexual assault hotline: 855-VOICES4

Confidential sexual assault text line: 866-238-1454

Love Is Respect

www.loveisrespect.org

Hotline: 866-331-9474

TTY: 866-331-8453

Text LOVEIS to 866-331-9474

Michigan Mental Health Warmline (10am-2am)

888-PEER-753 (888-733-7753)

Trevor Project

24-hr Trevor Project - 866-488-7386

24-hr Trans Lifeline - 877-565-8860

Information about Sexual Violence

Know Your XI (Know Your Nine)

<https://www.knowyourix.org/>

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools

<https://stopsexualassaultinschools.org/>



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